

# The Wellness Family

Dr. Leahy Keeps You Informed

## Boosting Your Child's Immune System

From Halloween until Christmas your child's immune system is being bombarded with poor nutritional choices, increased sugar intake and decreased sleep. Remember it's not just the Holiday Season, it's also the cold and flu season, and Dr. Leahy wants to help you protect your children from the assault.

### **The Diet Factor**

The type and quantity of food your child consumes is very important for their overall health. Food provides energy for their bodies, and there are several vitamins and minerals that are a fundamental part of a strong immunity, including the following:

- Vitamins A, C, E, Beta-Carotene and Selenium are antioxidants, which are part of our body's natural defense mechanism, and are consumed in fruits and vegetables.
- The mineral Zinc is important because of the role it plays in increasing your child's resistance to infection and is found in red meats, eggs and most dairy products.
- Magnesium is another important mineral essential for boosting your child's immune system and is available in legumes and milk.

During this especially busy time of year parents aren't as watchful of what their children are eating; and with organized sports and after-school activities taking up so much time, dinner is being skipped altogether or substituted with a quick trip through the drive-thru.

Most schools report increased absences as more children are suffering from colds and the flu because of weakened immunity. So, how do you fight back?

- Eat three meals and two snacks a day: making sure that four out of the five are healthy and remembering the daily recommendation of five servings of fruits and vegetables.
- Purge the kitchen, eliminating all junk food and sugary snacks – or – store them in a medium sized Rubbermaid container in the garage or master bedroom out of the reach of children (make it an effort to get to these items and they won't be consumed as easily or as frequently).
- Keep fruits, nuts and boxed raisins on the counter; celery with peanut butter or other "like" items in the fridge; and go to your local health food store to find

some other great tasting alternatives. (ie. European or whole grain breads, cheeses and fruits).

- Consider taking the time once every six weeks to write down what your family eats for a week and look for areas of improvement.

### **The Sugar Factor**

This is the most crucial time of the year to consider this important part of your child's diet:

- Sugar consumption has increased 30% in the last ten years.
- Most children are consuming 50% of their calories from processed sugar.



*"It's not just the Holiday Season, it's also the cold and flu season."*

Sugar contains absolutely no nutrients and studies have proven that excessive sugar intake can deplete your body of several vitamins and minerals. A high intake of processed sugar adversely affects the immune system since it impairs the ability of white blood cells to sweep up and kill bacteria. It also robs the body of key nutrients such as zinc, which we know is an important part of your child's natural ability to fight off infections.

Throw in the Holiday factor and the increased intake of sweets, and your child's immune system is under attack during a vital time of year. With the weather growing noticeably colder, and the average child spending more time indoors, the lack of activity combined with an increased intake of processed sugars all adds up to a weakened immune system.

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### **The Sleep Factor**

Having long been considered a restorative process that is a fundamental part of a healthy body, recent clinical studies have found sleep also to be a crucial part of a properly functioning immune system. Did you know that a sleep-deprived individual's immune system includes patterns of alteration similar to those found in depressed and alcoholic patients? Yes, a lack of proper rest can potentially cause a child's immune system to suffer the same changes as those caused by depression and alcoholism.

| <b>Age</b>  | <b>Total Hours Sleep</b> | <b>Naps in Hours</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 6 Months    | 14-15                    | 3-4                  |
| 1-2 Years   | 13-14                    | 1-3                  |
| 3 Years     | 12-13                    | 1                    |
| 4 Years     | 11-12                    | no longer naps       |
| 5-9 Years   | 10-11                    | no longer naps       |
| 10-15 Years | 9-10                     | no longer naps       |
| 16+ Years   | approx. 8 hours          | no longer naps       |

It may be that your child just won't sleep this long, but, while this chart is certainly not a requirement, it is most definitely a healthy guideline. The most important thing to remember is that good rest is a prerequisite for a healthy immune system, so begin to establish a simple routine Sunday through Thursday that encourages your child to get their much-needed sleep.

Some suggested routines to introduce would be:

- No TV, VCR, DVD or computer/video games in the child's room.
- No homework right before bed.
- No over-stimulation the hour before bedtime: avoid TV, computer games; instead play soothing music or have "Story Time" with little ones.

### **The Health Factor**

It boils down to this: you don't want your child sick during the holidays anymore than your child wants to be sick so teach your child healthy habits to avoid the spreading of germs.

- Recently documented evidence shows that frequently washing your hands with soap and water can avoid the spreading of most childhood illness.
- Make sure that your child doesn't share drinks or food with other children.
- If your child has recently been sick replace their toothbrush or take a moment to clean it in vinegar and water.

### **Dr. Leahy's Top Five Tips for a Strong Immunity**

5. Once every six weeks monitor what your family eats for one week, watching for areas where the sugar intake is too high and the fruits and vegetables intake is too low.
4. Make sure that four out of five of your family's daily meals are healthy.
3. Find a healthy multivitamin and chewable vitamin C at your local health food store (not a pharmacy or grocery store since most of the popular children's chewable vitamins contain high amounts of sugar).
2. Make sure that your child is getting adequate and restful sleep.
1. Make a point of keeping up with your regular adjustments – they increase immunity while decreasing stress – and be sure to discuss any additional concerns with Dr. Leahy!

*Dear Parent,*

*Dr. Leahy is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. Along with that dedication comes an understanding that an informed parent makes wise decisions for their child. So, take a moment today to ask Dr. Leahy about any concerns you may have regarding your child or your family's health.*

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